



News Release

**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Northwestern Division
Public Affairs Office

12565 West Center Road
Omaha, Nebraska 68144-3869

Contact: Paul Johnston
(402) 697-2552

Phone: (402) 697-2552
Fax: (402) 697-2554

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OMAHA -- The Army Corps of Engineers today released the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual Review and Update, detailing six alternatives. The Corps will consider a wide range of public opinion to select a plan that can satisfy environmental imperatives as well as other project purposes, such as navigation and flood damage reduction.

Because the document is still a draft, the Corps does not present a single preferred alternative. By placing six alternatives on the table, the Corps seeks an open discussion regarding all the options and their impacts rather than focusing on a single plan. The Corps intends that the Final Environmental Impact Statement contain a single preferred alternative when released for public review in May 2002.

"We have come to a very important point in the review and update process for the Missouri River Master Manual," said Col. David Fastabend, Northwestern Division Engineer. "We feel it is important to present more than one plan and receive comments from the people affected by the proposed changes. The RDEIS includes analyses of the alternatives that allow people to understand and compare the impacts of potential changes."

The RDEIS analyzes the environmental effects of a set of six alternative operating plans for the Master Manual – the current water control plan, a modified conservation plan, and four alternatives that add various Gavins Point Dam releases to the modified conservation plan, including a spring rise and low summer releases. There are a number of common features, explained below.

The document also presents a comprehensive description of the economic, social and environmental impacts on flood control, navigation, fish and wildlife, hydropower, water supply, water quality, recreation and irrigation.

To gather maximum input, the Corps will have a six-month public comment period, which will run until the end of February 2002. During that time, workshops and hearings will be held from Helena, Mont., to New Orleans, La., to explain the plans and take comments on the impacts from tribes, individuals, states, other federal agencies and special interest groups. Written comments will be accepted throughout the comment period via mail and Internet.

There are features common to all the alternatives except the current water control plan. The common features are:

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Corps releases Missouri River Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement

- **Drought conservation measures.** Navigation service levels would be reduced earlier in a drought than under the current water control plan. This would allow more water to be stored in the three large reservoirs in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. During severe droughts, like the one in the 1930s, support for navigation would be eliminated at a higher storage level than under the current plan. During a drought such as the one in the 1980s, these measures would increase storage in the reservoirs from 40 million acre feet (MAF) to 43 MAF, 3 feet more water in the three upper reservoirs during that drought.

- **Fort Peck Dam release changes.** Releases would be increased up to 23,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) for three weeks in May and June on average every three years. A mix of cold water through the powerhouse and warm water over the spillway is intended to trigger pallid sturgeon spawning by increasing both flow and temperature in the river reach downstream from the dam.

- **Unbalancing the 3 upper reservoirs.** One of the three upper reservoirs would be lowered approximately 3 feet to allow vegetation to grow around the rim, and then refilled to inundate that vegetation. The unbalancing would rotate among the three lakes on a three-year cycle. The practice would benefit the three protected species - pallid sturgeon, least tern and piping plover. In addition, it would provide spawning and rearing habitat for young forage and game fish in the lakes.

- **Adaptive management.** This is an overall strategy for dealing with change and scientific uncertainty. It promotes testing hypotheses and exploring promising changes to operations based on sound scientific data and analyses.

Four alternatives add a range of modified releases from Gavins Point Dam. This involves:

- **a "spring rise"** from Gavins Point Dam of 15,000 cfs to 20,000 cfs above full navigation targets for 2 weeks on average every three years to trigger pallid sturgeon spawning. If implemented, the rise may begin at 15,000 cfs followed by monitoring and evaluating the biological response. The rise would not be provided in years with high downstream tributary flows like 2001 and would make full consideration of any flood threats downstream.

- **low annual releases** from Gavins Point from mid-June to mid-August to provide nesting habitat for least terns and piping plovers. If implemented, they would begin at the minimum navigation service level of approximately 28,000 cfs to 21,000 cfs, followed by monitoring and evaluation of the biological response.

All comments received during the public comment period will be fully considered prior to the selection of a water control plan and the preparation of a final EIS, currently scheduled for May 2002.

Copies of the Summary of the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement, workshop schedule, library depositories and other support material are available at www.nwd.usace.army.mil or by writing to Project Manager, Master Manual Review and Update, 12565 West Center Road, Omaha, NE 68144. The complete document will be available by mid-September.